TEMPEST

Stoughton's forever war

The legacy of Vietnam in my hometown

by ***Joe Allen***

The battles of the Vietnam War have given way to recurring battles over its legacy. ***Joe Allen*** *looks at the war's impact on his Massachusetts hometown.*

Talking about the Vietnam War these days is a very difficult affair. It seems to be encased in some strange culture tomb of Hollywood-produced feature films and television series left over from the 1980s, most of which are dreadful. The war has become so **distorted** (https://www.amazon.com/Spitting-Image-Memory-Legacy-Vietnam/dp/0814751474/ref=cm_cr_arp_d_product_top?ie=UTF8) as to be unrecognizable to participants in the great events of that time, as well as being stolen by the **far right** (https://news.uchicago.edu/podcasts/big-brains/rise-white-power-movement-kathleen-belew) for their own nefarious political agenda.

Efforts to revive interest in the war have proved momentarily popular but failed to generate a sustained revival. Former PBS talk show host **Tavis Smiley's effort** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzxy4NRSadc) during the Obama presidency to revive interest in Martin Luther King's anti-war 1967 declaration "Beyond Vietnam" and Ken Burns' epic series The Vietnam War are examples of this. Many

good books continue to be published, including Chris Appy's American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity, but they fail to break out beyond an academic audience.

A large part of the reason for this are the disastrous wars waged in Afghanistan and Iraq—dubbed the "Forever Wars." It feels sometimes like Vietnam has become a lost footnote in our modern history. The sudden collapse of the Kabul government in August 2021 and the rapid withdrawal of the remaining U.S. forces drew parallels with the **chaotic evacuation** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wD64kYG-z5I) from the rooftop of the U.S. embassy in Saigon in April 1975. Yet, beyond surface analogies between both events, **few delved deeper** (https://tempestmag.org/2021/08/never-forget-afghanistan/) into larger reasons that motivated the United States to fight unpopular wars for decades far from its shores.

My family included Marine Corps veterans and anti-war activists. Debates about the war in my family continued long after it was over.

The U.S. rout in Afghanistan brought back memories of the impact of the Vietnam War on my hometown of Stoughton, Massachusetts. Vietnam was a deeply personal matter. My family included Marine Corps veterans and anti-war activists. Debates about the war in my family continued long after it was over. Like many millions of other families, it changed how we thought about military service and U.S. foreign policy. Before the Forever Wars of Iraq and Afghanistan, Vietnam was the longest war in U.S. history. [1] Vietnam was the "forever war" before the Forever Wars.

The Vietnam War brought pain and heartbreak to Stoughton. My hometown was patriotic—and, on too many occasions, narrow-minded—but there was also a small group of people who tried to bring an anti-war message, including those who were willing to give up their freedom to stop the war.

Working class war

Stoughton was one of thousands of working-class communities across the country that shouldered the burden of the war. By 1969, anti-war sentiment had spread to every corner of the United States. The war came to be seen as a colossal waste of human life that political leaders kept promising to end but escalated with each passing year. The impact of the war was especially dramatic in working-class communities across the country.

"Most Americans who fought in Vietnam were powerless, working-class teenagers sent to fight an undeclared war by presidents for whom they were not even eligible to vote," declared historian Christian Appy in his classic book Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam. Appy compared the Vietnam War deaths of three wealthy suburbs with Boston's working-class Dorchester neighborhood. He wrote:

> *The three affluent towns of Milton, Lexington, Wellesley had a combined wartime population of about 100,000, roughly equal to that of Dorchester. However, while those suburbs suffered a total of eleven war deaths, Dorchester lost forty-two.*

Like many working-class communities, Stoughton paid a heavy price for the war. Located twenty miles south of Boston, Stoughton's population increased from a little than 16,000 in 1960 to over 23,000 in 1970—or the bulk of the Vietnam War years. It was overwhelmingly working-class and white with few African American residents. Vietnam War casualties, by one **estimate** (https://books.google.com/books?id=dcL6w-VmjWwC&pg=PA108&lpg=PA108&dq=The+boys+of+Beallsville+by+John+Pilger&source=bl&ots=1sLl95ISig&sig=ACfU3U3L8HZe27hNW14bRx5O8mkUwodXtw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiky7

rrlqj1AhUnj4kEHVyWD2gQ6AF6BAgQEAM#v=onepage&q=The%20boys%20of%20Beallsville%20by%20John%20Pilger&f=false), averaged one for every six thousand of the U.S. population. Stoughton's was well above the national average with **nine** (https://patch.com/massachusetts/stoughton/stoughton-s-fallen-soldiers) of its native sons killed in Vietnam.

Most were barely out of high school when their lives were cut short.

Looking through the Stoughton Chronicle, the town's weekly newspaper—which gave extensive coverage to the casualties and funerals of Stoughton's war dead—it seems pretty clear to me that the bulk of the dead came from modest white blue-collar, working-class families. This was true throughout many big white working-class neighborhoods in the cities, burgeoning suburbs, and older factory towns across the country. [2]

This is not to say that every soldier sent into combat from Stoughton came from a working-class family. Charlie Yaitanes' son George was not. **Yaitanes** (https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/southofboston-ledger/name/charles-yaitanes-obituary?id=24308251) was a prominent businessperson and political figure in Stoughton. Yaitanes' book My Son's War is an important memoir of the war and its impact on my hometown. It's to understand how **class-biased** (https://www.truthdig.com/articles/was-ending-the-draft-a-grave-mistake-no/) the Selective Service System (or the draft) was, by providing an out for the middle and upper class, if they chose, while leaning deliberately on young working-class men, still teenagers in many cases.

Looking at the list of Stoughton's combat deaths, it's shocking to me how young they were. **Michael Shuman** (https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/47353/MICHAEL-B-SHUMAN/) was 22 when he was killed in August 1968. **Paul McEachron** (https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/36584/PAUL-MCEACHRON/) had just turned 20 years old when he was killed in August 1967. **Simeon Bergeron** (https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/3687/SIMEON-J-BERGERON/) was 20 when he was killed in March 1968. **Paul Czerwonka** (https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/11668/PAUL-S-CZERWONKA/) was 19 when he was killed in May 1968. **Peter Mears** (https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/33298/PETER-J-MEARS-JR/) was 19 when he was killed in August 1968. **Gary Guest** (https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/20358/GARY-R-GUEST/) was 19 when he was killed in May 1969. **Kevin Clancy** (https://www.facebook.com/groups/2234077507/posts/10159068324977508/?comment_id=10159068620342508) was not killed in combat in Vietnam but during in training in the Navy in July 1967. He was 22.

IN MEMORIAM
Kevin Clancy
Paul McEachron
It was just a few short years ago that *Kevin Clancy* starred for the Stoughton High School football and baseball teams . . . that *Paul McEachron* dazzled the fans with thrilling runs and interceptions on the gridiron . . . two inspirational boys . . . zealous competitors . . . respected by coaches and teammates . . . but, above all, by younger players . . . dependable and loyal . . . During the past year, *Ensign Kevin Clancy* lost his life while on active service for the U. S. Navy . . . *Lance Corporal Paul McEachron* perished in combat with the Marines in Viet Nam . . . To the memory of these true warriors . . . on and off the field . . . we dedicate the pages of the sports section of the 1968 STOTONIAN . . .

Memorial to fallen alumni Kevin Clancy and Paul McEachron in the 1968 Stotonian yearbook. ***Image (https://archive.org/details/stoughtonhighsch1968stou/page/134/mode/2up)*** *from Internet Archive.*

In the high school's yearbooks and the Stoughton Chronicle, the weekly town newspaper, I've found that the war dead ran the gamut of personalities you came across in high school. Michael Shuman wanted to be a **journalist** (https://archive.org/details/stoughtonhighsch1964stou/page/60/mode/2up). Paul McEachron was co-captain of the Stoughton High football team, according to the Chronicle. The newspaper also published a heart-felt tribute to Peter Mears on August 28 that portrayed him as a modest, reliable student, popular with his friends, and then concluded with:

> *His family knew him as the son they had prayed to have and watched grow up and much too soon, saw don an Army uniform. He was nineteen years old. He is dead in Vietnam and his town, the people who loved him, his family and his friends have lost a vital link.*

Most were barely out of high school when their lives were cut short. But two of Stoughton's war dead tell different stories. **William Joyce** (https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/26974/WILLIAM-F-JOYCE/) joined the Marines in 1963. He was the first Stoughton resident killed in Vietnam in 1966 but under the name **"Richard J. Preskenis."** (http://www.marzone.com/charley/art003.htm) Joyce stole Preskenis' identity because a criminal record prevented him from joining under his own name. **George Evans** (https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/15415/GEORGE-F-EVANS/) was the oldest killed. He was thirty-six years old and a Sergeant First Class in the U.S. Army. He appears to have made the army a career.

Cult of the Marine Corps

Four of Stoughton's nine war dead were Marines. Most if not all volunteered. Along with the Army, they shouldered the burden of the ground war throughout the Vietnam War. The Marines were the smallest of the military services, but they had a huge cultural footprint, as well as a **cult-like** (https://web.archive.org/web/20110131164517/http:/www.gustavhasford.com/timers.htm)

internal culture. With well-known film stars like **John Wayne** (https://writerswithoutmoney.com/2016/03/14/the-sands-of-iwo-jima-1949/) leading the way in films like Sands of Iwo Jima, a generation of American youth had their heads filled with macho nonsense about embracing war, carnage, and death.

I know something about the allure of the Marines. Both my mother Beverly Vigneaux and her brother—my uncle—Joseph Leo Vigneaux, joined the Marines soon after graduating from high school in the mid-1950s. Their yearbooks don't hint at military service. My **mother's** (https://archive.org/details/stoughtonhighsch1955stou/page/28/mode/2up) has a line from a sonnet, "Fond of dreams, fun, and praise; so very modern in her ways." **My uncle's desire** (https://archive.org/details/stoughtonhighsch1956stou/page/28/mode/2up) after graduation was to become a music teacher, and he wrote, "God match me with a good dancer."

How did they end up in the Marines? My mother joined up, she told me years later, to get away from Stoughton for a while. The prospect of immediately working in one of Stoughton's many factories or waitressing, followed by the inevitability of marriage and kids, pushed her to want to have a few years of fun and adventure. But, she was also attracted to the image of the tough, the **first to fight** (https://www.google.com/search?q=First+to+fight+marines&sxsrf=AOaemvI_6km_VymxkOIL6TpCGNnhDPRQWQ:1642865684408&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiB2aDM18X1AhWCl2oFHencCX4Q_AUoAXoECAIQAw&biw=1623&bih=809&dpr=1#imgrc=3EaI0hRjKYVocM), appealed even to a young woman who would do clerical work in the 1950s. She did one tour and returned to Stoughton.

My uncle had other motivations. He had a big chip on his shoulder. My maternal grandparents had a nasty, painful divorce in the 1940s when only Hollywood movie stars and British aristocrats got divorced. It was a hidden scar that both my mother and uncle wore, but it cut deeply into my uncle. He held a deep grudge. Along with being short in stature and constantly bullied for it, he always seemed to

be struggling to prove something to himself and others. The Marines Corps tapped into **this longing** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Bjy-IQWFg0) in him. Leo would pay dearly for it in Vietnam.

But that was the 1950s, when paranoid anti-Communism and conservative Catholicism also served as cultural and political pushes to join the Marines. What about the 1960s on the eve of the Vietnam war? Ron Kovic's life provides some insight.

The allure of the Marines: recruiting photo from 1917. ***Library of Congress*** ***(https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002722434/)****, modified by Tempest.*

Kovic, whose memoir Born on Fourth of July and the later film starring Tom Cruise, told the story of a working-class kid who went from patriotic Marine Corps volunteer to anti-war activist. He was raised in the working-class suburb of Massapequa on Long Island in New York. He was an excellent athlete in high school, but college was beyond his family's reach. Kovic recalled [3] how the Marines recruited him:

> *I didn't want to be like my Dad, coming home from the A&P [supermarket] every night. He was a strong man, a good man, but it made him so tired, it took all of the energy out of him. I didn't want to be like that working in that stinking A&P, six days a week, twelve hours a day. I wanted to be somebody. I wanted to make something out of my life.*
>
> *In the last month of school, the marine recruiters came and spoke to my senior class. They marched, both in perfect step, into the auditorium with their dress blue uniforms and their magnificently shined shoes. It was like in all the movies and all the books and all the dreams of becoming a hero came true.*

Soon afterward, Kovic went to the local recruiting station with his father and joined the Marines in 1964. Dreams, image, and potential heroic feats drew tens of thousands into the Marines during the Vietnam War years, while many others were drafted. For those who volunteered, few found the dreams they pursued. Nearly **fifteen thousand** (https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics) Marines died in Vietnam. My uncle survived the war and returned home shortly after the **Tet Offensive** (https://www.vietnamfulldisclosure.org/50th-anniversary-tet-offensive/) in 1968. His war was far from over.

Memorial Day 1969

1968 had brought disaster to Stoughton with three of their sons killed in combat in Vietnam. For several years, Stoughton residents had witnessed the grim sight of Defense Department cars winding their way through the streets to the homes of families to be informed that their son was dead. Everyone knew what their arrival meant, and sometimes neighbors gathered in small crowds, and friends were called to console the family of the deceased.

Stoughton was still a patriotic town, however, and there were few outward signs of opposition to the war. Marches and parades on Memorial Day, July 4, and Veteran' Day were major events to honor the fallen of Vietnam and to proclaim one's patriotism. But in reading the coverage of the Memorial Day parade in 1969, one can sense an undercurrent of unease at the continued sacrifice of Stoughton's youth for what seemed to many a senseless and unwinnable war.

The Stoughton Chronicle reported on May 29:

> *Stoughton, along with other communities in Massachusetts, honored its dead Monday in impressive Memorial Day exercises favored by clear skies and brisk northerly breeze that matched the zip step of 20 marching units.*

The parade started off at two locations, the Brockton Public Market and the Department of Public Works yards. Contingents of the police and fire department along with the American Legion, all of the town's selectmen, the high school and other marching bands made their way to various cemeteries where the war dead were laid to rest. Wreaths were laid, speeches given, and shots fired along with "Taps" played to honor the fallen.

It was an impressive display of the establishment in Stoughton, yet the Chronicle gave voice to what many people had on their minds but did publicly express. In its lead editorial "Memorial Day in Stoughton," it declared:

> *This is what Memorial Day is all about. Time to pause and remember our dead, especially those who have paid the supreme sacrifice in the service of their country.*

> *The added prayer for safe-keeping of those in the Armed Forces seemed especially significant on this day. For they are mostly young, our 18, 19 and 20 year old boys who only a few years ago may have been participating in or viewing similar ceremonies in Stoughton Square or one of its counterparts elsewhere in the state.*
>
> *The fearful thought to many adults was that within a few years some of these school children could be serving in a Vietnam or Korea-type conflict.*
>
> *The awfulness of this proposition is not that they will be called upon to serve, for to the vast majority of Americans it is an honor accepted with the dignity it deserves—but that Vietnam goes on unresolved.*
>
> *We can only hope that next Memorial Day's speakers can say of the fighting in Vietnam, 'Thank God it's over.'*

Youth radicalism

While Stoughton was still very patriotic on the surface level, the youth radicalism of the era began to edge its way in, sometimes in surprising ways. For example, the Stoughton High School chapter of the National Honor Society hosted a regional conference of honor societies that featured a debate between Jeff Alexander of the Harvard **Students for a Democratic Society** (https://www.sds-1960s.org/books/sds.pdf) (SDS), the radical, left-wing student group, and a representative of the **Young Americans for Freedom** (https://www.yaf.org/) (YAF), founded by the well-known conservative and publisher of the National Review, William F. Buckley. The topic of debate was, "Leadership—What's ahead?"

Jeff Alexander was a leading figure in the Harvard SDS that led militant demonstrations the previous spring that culminated the **occupation** (https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1984/4/9/reflecting-on-the-1969-student-strike/) of University Hall. According to the Stoughton Chronicle, was "an admitted socialist," who chided the Honor Society for having so few black students in

attendance. He told the audience that schools "brainwash" students, and that "people should but don't control decision making in this country." He finished by declaring, "The only way we can make change in this country is by coercion; therefore, we favor revolution," according to the Stoughton Chronicle of May 15, 1969.

Meanwhile, three seniors at Stoughton High School launched an alternative newspaper Contre Façade, independent of the officially sanctioned high school newspaper. They wanted an independent student newspaper that would act as "the student voice," reported the Stoughton Chronicle on April 24, 1969. "Student 'Underground' Newspaper Takes Aim on Establishment" was the panicked headline. It was produced using mimeograph machines donated by a local church. Its pages were filled with satire, poems, and critical articles about the high school administration. The editors said that they weren't interested in what they called, "Suzy cream cheese and cat and kittens type of journalism."

The Moratorium

Yet public displays of anti-war sentiment were few if any in Stoughton until the call for a national Moratorium on October 15, 1969. The idea for the Moratorium originated with Massachusetts' liberal peace activist **Jerome Grossman** (https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/obituaries/2013/12/25/jerome-grossman-longtime-democratic-activist-was-self-described-relentless-liberal/ItMjAYgS3HNVKgivk33ikO/story.html). By 1969, there was already a large anti-war movement in the United States that impacted national politics. Richard Nixon was elected president in 1968, in part, because he implied he had a **"secret plan"** (https://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/nixons-secret-plan-to-end-vietnam-war-video) to end the war in Vietnam, while simultaneously undermining peace negotiations during the presidential campaign.

Frustrated with the Nixon administration's war policies, Grossman—a self-described **"relentless liberal"** (https://www.amazon.com/Relentless-Liberal-Jerome-Grossman/dp/B0006F7624)—first thought of putting out a call for **general strike** (https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_War_Within/F_IdCwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0) to end the war, but America's union leadership was still by-and-large pro-war, though some major unions began to move into the anti-war camp. The Moratorium—a temporary halt to public activity—was the backup plan, and it succeeded beyond the organizers' wildest dreams when over **10 million people** (https://www.c-span.org/video/?61353-1/vietnam-moratorium) participated in events in their local communities.

> *The Moratorium events throughout the South Shore of Massachusetts brought to the surface a burgeoning anti-war sentiment…[that]…could not be pushed back underground.*

In Stoughton, the call for a Moratorium was embraced by the religious activists at the Packard Manse Ecumenical Center. Its co-director Paul K. Chapman saw the "October 15 day of protest against the war in Vietnam as a 'memorial' to those who have lost their lives in the conflict," reported the Chronicle on October 9. Chapman had first become a religious activist in support of civil rights. He **heeded the call** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWNYFj9tCtk) of Martin Luther King and went to the South in support of the movement. He also wrote a regular column for the Chronicle called "Listening."

Another Packard Manse activist, Rev. Robert Cunnane, had already been convicted in state court and faced federal trial for destroying draft records in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in September 1968, as the Chronicle noted on June 12, 1969. Cunnane was a member of the **"Milwaukee 14,"** (https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/wmh/id/52817) who were mostly Catholic activists opposed to the Vietnam War. Twelve of the defendants surprisingly had the federal charges dropped against them by the presiding judge during jury selection. The actions of Cunnane and other Catholic peace activists were a sign that the U.S. Catholic Church, which had been vehemently pro-war under **Cardinal Spellman** (https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1059&context=honors_thesis), was changing with the rise of a new generation of radical priests.

Chapman called the Moratorium Stoughton's "Vietnam peace action," which would be held on the front lawn of the First Parish Unitarian-Universalist Church in the town square, where participants would gather on October 15 at 6 a.m. "to begin reading the roll of American war dead." Students from Stoughton High School and the nearby Stonehill College attended, as well as members of a broad array of religious denominations. "We don't expect any opposition," Chapman told the Stoughton Chronicle. "After 20 hours of reading the names people will realize the seriousness of it all."

The Moratorium came off without a hitch and no opposition. "A small group turned out throughout the day to read the names of those who lost their lives in the Vietnam conflict," the Chronicle reported. During the reading, a plane flew overhead, trailing a banner that said, "Stop the War." The Moratorium events throughout the South Shore of Massachusetts brought to the surface a burgeoning anti-war sentiment, as made clear in reports from nearby towns—Quincy's Patriot Ledger and the Brockton Enterprise. No active-duty GIs were killed in Vietnam on the day of Moratorium, according to the Enterprise.

What had come to surface with the Moratorium could not be pushed back underground. Jim Gormley started teaching at Stoughton High School in September 1970. I asked him recently what the atmosphere was like at the high school during the latter years of the Vietnam War. "Most of the younger teachers were against the war," recalled Gormley. "Some of the older teachers continued to support the war. But every day you saw Paul Czerwonka's father [he was chief custodian] in the hallways, which reminded you of the war."

When military recruiters opened a recruiting station at the Stoughton Town Hall in mid-August 1971, they found, according to the Chronicle, "that the first visitors were not young men but a group of anti-war mothers."

Draft resistance also made its way into Stoughton. In 1971, Salvatore A. Ferraioli announced that he had applied for Conscientious Objector status to the local draft board, which denied his request. He announced that he wasn't going to report for basic training and was facing federal trial. The Stoughton Chronicle ran an incredibly supportive headline on November 11: "He chose to stick his neck out." Chronicle reporter Paul Wagman interviewed Ferraioli and his parents in the family's living room, where his mother said, "That's the way he was brought up. I'm proud of him. He's living his own beliefs, and conscience, just the way we told him for 23 years. We're behind him a 100 percent."

And if the U.S. Army didn't have enough problems recruiting youth to its ranks in the early 1970s, a group of Stoughton mothers formed a chapter of Another Mother for Peace. When military recruiters opened a recruiting station at the Stoughton Town Hall in August 1971, they found, according to the Stoughton Chronicle, "that the first visitors were not young men but a group of anti-war mothers." They "grilled the recruiting Sergeant Robert McWalter for an hour with questions ranging from the morality of the war to the authenticity of the Army's advertising claims." Most importantly, "the mothers wanted to know what Sgt. McWalter intends to tell the community's young men about the war," said the Chronicle on August 26.

War and Memory

My understanding of the Vietnam War came like Charlie Yaitanes, at first, largely through its impact on my family, when I was a kid and young teenager. My uncle Joseph Leo Vigneaux served in the Marine Corps in Vietnam. He was a gunnery sergeant with the Third Marine division. The penultimate battle of the war for him was retaking Hue after the Tet Offensive. The war had a terrible impact on his physical and mental health—issues that he only partly overcame. He continued to struggle with PTSD and exposure to **Agent Orange** (https://www.amazon.com/Waiting-Army-Die-Tragedy-Orange/dp/1609801369) until his death from cancer in 1998.

My late cousin **Stephen Crosby** (https://www.facebook.com/stephencrosby2023) helped shape my views of Vietnam through my teenage years as I became more interested in history and politics. Stephen was an anti-war activist at **UMass-Boston** (https://blogs.umb.edu/archives/2015/05/04/may4matters-remembering-the-45th-anniversary-of-the-shootings-at-kent-state/) in the late 1960s. He first put into my head that the Vietnam War was not an accident or an aberration but part of a long history of U.S. intervention in other nations. He was the first person who taught me that Vietnamese were real human beings, not cartoon, racist caricatures; they had with a long and honorable history of wars and rebellions for national independence.

Marines evacuate their wounded by helicopter, 1967. ***Photo*** *(https://www.flickr.com/photos/13476480@N07/36378709506) by manhhai.*

I later went to UMass-Boston in 1978, at least in part to study these issues more deeply. I was lucky to be able to study the Vietnam War with one of the country's leading scholars, **David Hunt** (https://www.umb.edu/academics/cla/faculty/david_hunt). David's lectures and his **articles** (http://libcom.org/files/images/library/Rad%20AmericaV8%20I1-2-page-001.jpg) and **books** (https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1558496920/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_bibl_vppi_i0) gave a deeper, more mature understanding of what led the United States to fight a war in Vietnam, and the nature of the popular resistance that defeated first the French then the Americans. My education on the Vietnam War continued long after I left UMass-Boston. I continue to devour history books on Vietnam and novels, especially the writings of **Tim O'Brien** (https://www.amazon.com/War-Peace-Tim-OBrien/dp/B08W35QTVK).

Decades later, in 2008, I would write my own book on Vietnam. **Vietnam: The (Last) War the U.S. Lost** (https://www.haymarketbooks.org/books/848-vietnam-the-last-war-the-u-s-lost) was my attempt to explain the Vietnam War and the anti-war movement to a new generation of activists opposed to the disastrous U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s. I dedicated my book to:

> *All Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Americans who continue to suffer death and deformity as a result of America's use of weapons of mass destruction in Southeast Asia from 1960 to 1975.*

One of the terrible legacies of the Vietnam War is the destructive power of the U.S. war machine not only on indigenous people targeted, but also how it can blow back on American soldiers and their communities. The cancer-causing defoliant Agent Orange used to defoliate the jungles of Southeast proved to be a multi-generational **disaster in Vietnam** (https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/agent-

orange-1), as well causing the deaths of **300,000** (https://www.nd.gov/veterans/news/agent-orange-its-affecting-veterans-and-their-kids#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20Vietnam%20veterans,thousand%20who%20died%20in%20combat.) U.S. Vietnam combat veterans, including my uncle. This destructive power and blowback continued with the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars.

Vietnamese-American writer Viet Thanh Nguyen wrote, "All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory." [4] The battle for the memory of the Vietnam War continues.

Featured Image Credit: Joseph Leo Vigneaux, uncle of the author, second from right, modified by Tempest.

Joe Allen is a long-time labor activist and writer. His latest book is *The Package King: A Rank and File History of UPS*.